

# The Farm Labor Situation in California

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## SHORTAGE OF FARM LABOR

Persistent reports and requests for farm help reaching this office indicate a farm labor shortage especially of milkers, teamsters, riders, and others needed for handling and working stock. Irrigators are rather difficult to secure, and the number is limited of laborers for hand work on asparagus, sugar beets, cotton, and similar crops requiring work of a hard, back-breaking kind.

Some of the reasons for this scarcity are that:

First.—Many Austrians, Italians, and Servians, called to the colors, have gone out of the country.

Second.—As a result of troubles between Chinese Tongs, many Chinese are in hiding.

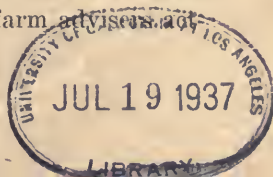
Third.—The formation of Hindu companies for active farming operations for themselves, especially in the rice fields, has reduced the former available supply.

Fourth.—Highway construction has taken men—particularly teamsters—directly away from farm work.

Fifth.—The gradual withdrawal of men formerly fitted for and trained in agricultural vocations into other lines of work, has not been offset by entrance of equal numbers into farm work.

Sixth.—Activity in manufacturing enterprises has drawn upon much of the available labor. Business concerns, realizing that their ultimate success rests on a steady supply of unskilled labor, are consistently outbidding the farmer in wages, housing facilities, working hours and general working conditions. The farmer is thus thrown into competition with all other business requiring unskilled labor such as the lumber companies, iron works, shipyards, quarries, and railroad companies.

That the farm labor need has doubtless been overestimated in making calculations for the season, may be gathered from a post-harvest survey of all the farmers in seventeen counties, conducted between May 20th and 30th, 1917, by the respective county farm advisers.



ing under direction of the State Leader, Professor B. H. Crocheron. In all over 28,000 self-addressed, returnable post-cards such as the following were sent out:

#### LABOR SURVEY

(Date).....I will need.....men.....women.....children  
more than I now expect to be able to obtain. They will be needed during a  
period of.....days, from.....(date) to.....(date)  
to help in.....work.

Answer Yes or No:

I will provide

I will pay

Room and board .....  
Camping grounds .....  
House .....  
Water .....  
Sanitary conveniences .....

Per box .....  
Per ton .....  
Per day .....  
Per month .....

Signature .....

Address .....

The following figures were derived from the returns of this postal-card survey:

#### SUMMARY OF LABOR SURVEY OF SEVENTEEN COUNTIES OF CALIFORNIA, AS CONDUCTED BY THE COUNTY FARM ADVISERS OF CALIFORNIA

(Results June 28, 1917)

| County            | Number<br>cards<br>sent | Replies<br>received<br>back | Did not<br>want<br>labor | Wanted<br>labor | Men  | Labor wanted |          | Total |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|------|--------------|----------|-------|
|                   |                         |                             |                          |                 |      | Women        | Children |       |
| Alameda .....     | 1900                    | 21                          | 16                       | 5               | 166  | 60           | ....     | 226   |
| Glenn .....       | 1400                    | 138                         | 122                      | 16              | 95   | 1            | 7        | 103   |
| Humboldt .....    | 1985                    | 13                          | 12                       | 1               | 1    | ....         | ....     | 1     |
| Imperial .....    | 3400                    | 225                         | 110                      | 115             | 1437 | 229          | 63       | 1729  |
| Kern .....        | 1965                    | 40                          | 17                       | 23              | 194  | ....         | ....     | 194   |
| Madera .....      | 475                     | 97                          | 50                       | 47              | 335  | 31           | ....     | 366   |
| Merced .....      | 1300                    | 29                          | 15                       | 14              | 223  | 2            | 1        | 226   |
| Napa .....        | 2000                    | 73                          | 51                       | 22              | 109  | 3            | 12       | 124   |
| Nevada .....      | 547                     | 92                          | 88                       | 4               | 6    | 3            | 1        | 10    |
| Placer .....      | 600                     | 12                          | 9                        | 3               | 4    | 2            | ....     | 6     |
| Riverside .....   | 1000                    | 35                          | 25                       | 10              | 34   | 10           | ....     | 44    |
| Sacramento .....  | 500                     | 47                          | 36                       | 11              | 45   | ....         | ....     | 45    |
| San Diego .....   | 2228                    | 32                          | 21                       | 11              | 57   | 8            | ....     | 65    |
| San Joaquin ..... | 4135                    | 58                          | 34                       | 24              | 115  | 100          | ....     | 215   |
| Solano .....      | 1290                    | 86                          | 61                       | 25              | 119  | 34           | ....     | 153   |
| Stanislaus .....  | 2000                    | 557                         | 500                      | 57              | 252  | 12           | 2        | 266   |
| Yolo .....        | 1500                    | 56                          | 39                       | 17              | 290  | 71           | 20       | 381   |
|                   | 28225                   | 1611                        | 1206                     | 405             | 3482 | 566          | 106      | 4154  |

# LABOR SHORTAGE NECESSITATES USE OF EVERY AVAILABLE MAN

To successfully move all crops this year, available sources of help must be sought out and developed. There is available a certain potential supply of a kind of labor in the high school boys, patriotically inclined city dwellers, store clerks, and the output of charitable organizations. Some prison labor is also available.

Out of the vast amount and diversity of work required to carry on California agriculture, this labor cannot do much more than pick up prunes or walnuts, hoe weeds, handle a shovel, pitchfork, or manure fork, or pick berries. Without training or experience this kind of labor is but a "drop in the bucket." Yet to release capable men for other lines of work and to relieve at least partially the present lack in permanent jobs, farmers should make some attempt to utilize as far as practicable this raw labor. To do so to advantage, however, means a degree of patience in showing men how to do the work, a willingness to give new men time to heal blisters and restore lame backs, generosity in the matter of proper living conditions and wages, care to give first tasks commensurate with the beginner's strength, and a desire to foster a liking for and an enjoyment in the work.

To determine the potential supply of high school students available for work, a questionnaire was sent out by a committee, acting under Mr. Will C. Wood, appointed by the State Board of Education to organize a Students' Working Reserve. Replies tabulated from 142 high schools of the state (approximately one-half the total number), and covering about one-third the total high school enrollment, indicated:

|                                                                                                                          | Boys   | Girls  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|
| Number of returns .....                                                                                                  | 13,004 | 17,086 |
| Number volunteering for some kind of work on farms, in orchards, or in canneries during the summer vacation period ..... | 4,194  | 1,951  |
| Number who expect to be employed on home farm .....                                                                      | 2,273  | 1,794  |
| Number who expect to be employed in neighborhood, living at home .....                                                   | 3,332  | 2,408  |
| Number who if properly organized and supervised would accept employment requiring them to live away from home .....      | 2,158  | 541    |

Two hundred sixty-nine men teachers and 149 women teachers volunteered to assist in supervising groups of students.

An important decision which should result in increasing the possibility of utilizing students is that of the Attorney General of

California, who has ruled that schools may be officially closed so far as counting attendance is concerned, but that after such official closing teachers may be called upon to continue teaching for the benefit of those who wish to continue under such teaching. Furthermore, under a new law, boards of education have the right to pay salaries of teachers in twelve monthly installments, regardless of the question of whether or not teachers do some teaching in each month of the year.

#### **COUNCILS OF DEFENSE TO ASSIST FARMERS AND FARM HELPERS**

The State and County Councils of Defense, the University of California, and the U. S. Department of Agriculture, all recognize the necessity of rendering all possible assistance in bringing together possible labor and farmers who are in need of help. This work is being brought together in the office of the State Farm Labor Agent, 11 Budd Hall, University of California, Berkeley, California.

Since all efforts along the lines of securing labor are for the express purpose of winning the war, the greatest concern will be to help the growers of those things most needed directly or indirectly by the allies, such as wheat, barley, beans, cotton, hay, beef, sheep, pork, cheese, butter, poultry products, corn, sorghum, dried fruits, canned and dried vegetables.

#### **HOW FARMERS SHOULD PROCEED**

Farmers who are in need of help should apply to their County Council of Defense who, through its labor representative, will attempt to secure the necessary men locally. If, however, the demand cannot be met in this way the county representative on behalf of the farmer will make application for assistance to the State Farm Labor Agent, 11 Budd Hall, University of California, Berkeley, California.

Each farmer should, however, file his wants with the local County Council of Defense only after exhausting every possible source that he can reach, using every organization equipped with the necessary machinery for bringing farm help and farmers together, such as the regular employment agencies, the Public Employment Bureaus of the State of California operating offices at San Francisco (men), 933 Mission Street; San Francisco (women), Pacific Building; Oakland, 401 Tenth Street; Sacramento (men), 124 K Street; Sacramento (women), Forum Building; Los Angeles (men), 206 Franklin Street; Los Angeles (women), 207 South Broadway; and the United States Employment Service with offices at San Francisco (men), 2 Appraisers Building, Washington and Sansome Street; San Francisco

## EMPLOYER REQUEST FOR FARM LABOR

Date of Application .....

Name .....

Address .....

Phone .....

Location of Work .....

|                    | <i>Trained</i> | <i>Untrained</i> | <i>Women</i> | <i>Children</i> |
|--------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|-----------------|
| Kind of Help ..... | .....          | .....            | .....        | .....           |

Number Wanted .....

Age Limit .....

Nationality Preferred .....

When Wanted .....

For How Long .....

Wages .....

Housing Accommodations .....

Bedding Accommodations .....

Water .....

Fuel .....

Climate .....

Transportation .....

|       |            |        |            |
|-------|------------|--------|------------|
| (How) | (Advanced) | (Free) | (Refunded) |
|-------|------------|--------|------------|

Remarks .....



**EMPLOYEE APPLICATION FOR FARM WORK**

Date.....

Name .....

Address .....

Nationality .....

Sex ..... Age ..... Height ..... Weight .....

Telephone Number .....

(Give in full)

Agricultural Training (School).....

Agricultural Experience (Farm).....

Kind of Work Wanted .....

(i.e. haying, fruit picking, berry picking, cotton picking,  
beet thinning, irrigating, etc.)

Locality Preferred: First choice ..... Second choice .....

How Far from Home will you Pay Fare? .....

Minimum Wage Demand .....

Maximum Hours will Work Daily .....

Have you Camping Equipment? .....

Have you Blankets? .....

When will you be Available? .....

How Long will you be Available? .....

Physical Condition .....

Remarks .....

.....

.....

.....



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(women), 108 Customs House, Jackson and Battery Streets; Sacramento, Post Office Building; Fresno, 335 Rowell Building; Los Angeles (U. S. Dept. of Labor, Mr. C. T. Connell, inspector in charge). Other United States employment officers are maintained in the following towns: San Diego, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Bakersfield, and Calexico.

To insure sufficient data to assist in finding men, when a farmer finds it necessary to approach his local County Council of Defense for assistance, he should accompany his request with the form No. 1 (p. 5) completely filled out.

#### HOW APPLICANTS SHOULD PROCEED

Those wishing work upon farms should file an application with the local County Farm Labor Agent of the County Council of Defense, who, if he finds himself unable to avail himself of the applicants' services in the immediate vicinity will, in their behalf, report the names of the available men to the State Farm Labor Agent, 11 Budd Hall, University of California, Berkeley, California, for use in other localities.

To insure sufficient data to properly place any applicant, information in full should be given as indicated, in the blank form No. 2 (p. 7).

## COUNTY FARM LABOR AGENTS OF COUNTY COUNCILS OF DEFENSE

Many County Councils of Defense have already appointed a County Farm Labor Agent. When no such representative is available, farmers or workers should apply directly to the Chairman of their County Council of Defense for help or work.

### EMPLOYER'S RESPONSIBILITY

To insure a minimum amount of failure, it seems desirable to point out that obligations rest upon both parties to a labor situation.

*Housing.*—When attempts are made to utilize high school boys or city dwellers it must be borne in mind that these people are accustomed to a decent standard of living. Proper housing is a primary consideration for best results and involves provision for a due degree of privacy, a good bed, facilities for keeping clean, and generally proper sanitary accommodations.

*Boarding.*—The usual way of paying "so much and found," meaning as it does a cash wage together with board and lodging, can be replaced to advantage by substituting the practice used in most labor camps, other than ranches, where wages are quoted at so much per day with deduction for room and board, as for example, \$2.75 for ten-hour day with 75c off for board and lodging. Board and lodging is as much the worker's due as cash wages, and the above method offers an easily measured standard of values for perquisites. Such method further impresses upon the worker the necessity of first meeting his board and lodging before he expects to save on the work he does. Charges for board and room should be based upon the value given. The farmer must recognize that he is competing with city living conditions and if he charges \$1.00 per day must give comparable and equivalent value. In general, a relatively high rate for board and room, justified by providing full value, will mean more to the potential supply of labor under discussion, than uncomfortable surroundings at a low charge. Under this plan, the farmer can provide milk, butter, eggs, and similar foods demanded by the men and charge them with the cost. When many men are boarded and conditions will permit, a choice of foods for each meal is desirable.

House facilities, from the farmer's standpoint of investment, must of necessity conform to the amount of time they are in use. Permanent buildings are possible only when labor is employed for long periods of time, but tents, portable cook-cars (and bunk-cars when weather conditions warrant), portable bathing and sanitary condi-

tions can be arranged for short term work, especially if the equipment is owned jointly by farmers engaged in different lines of work, or by men having a diversity of enterprises not centrally located and calling for labor needs at different periods. Plans of a standard bunk-car and a cook-car are on file in this department for use of all interested, while the State Commission of Immigration and Housing, with offices at 525 Market Street, San Francisco, are ready to give substantial assistance in arranging proper housing conditions.

*Wages.*—In hiring city men or high school boys best results will follow whenever it is possible to pay for labor on a piece-work basis. Even when working on a piece basis provision should be made for a minimum hourly and daily return, for while piece work is best for untrained men, they are not experienced in farm work and cannot gauge a day's work. This minimum hourly return protects them to a certain extent. The farmer on his part is protected by his ability to discharge anyone with whom he is dissatisfied.

Piece work can be made to apply to all kinds of work—hoeing beans, picking fruits, harvesting corn, cultivating potatoes, digging potatoes, or pitching hay. Whenever feasible it has been found very satisfactory to establish a standard day's work and to pay a fixed bonus per piece to the workers on the days that they reach or exceed the standard.

As a gauge of what wages must be paid, recent conditions have brought about a present standard wage for unskilled labor—on which the farmer largely draws for his surplus needs—of from 25c to 30c per hour, with the general average of  $27\frac{1}{2}$ c, without board and lodging. Any farmer needing help should expect to pay this equivalent. The minimum guaranteed rate should be not less than 25c per hour, with reasonable possibility that under normal average conditions, a normal average workman can make about  $27\frac{1}{2}$ c, out of which is to come board and lodging.

The use of labor drawn from cities and high schools, is possible only on ranches having much routine work, and able to meet the housing and wage conditions. It will not be cheap labor—and for many kinds of farm work it will not be satisfactory labor, but there are enough situations when such help can be made useful and of economic value to warrant its consideration, such as picking berries, cutting fruit, hoeing, pitching hay, picking cotton, picking up walnuts and prunes, and picking certain kinds of fruit.

### EMPLOYEE'S RESPONSIBILITY

The high school boy or city man who because of patriotic or financial reasons goes into farm work, should carry with him a sense of personal responsibility. After properly investigating an opening and assuring himself that he is willing to try the work, the prospective employee should go to the work with a determination to remain. The average farmer has but little time to break in new men, and cannot afford to be constantly changing green crews. As the employee usually pays his fare to a given job he should first exhaust all nearby possibilities before looking beyond. It is not wise for a man to accept short-term employment at some distant place if his total earnings will be insufficient to pay his railroad transportation there and back. Briefly, the employee's responsibility means that he must go out into the field with the steadfast purpose of doing his best, to put in a full day, do his work in as satisfactory a manner as he is able, and to remain with the work as long as he agrees to at the beginning.

### TRIALS WITH POTENTIAL HIGH SCHOOL AND CITY LABOR

When any farmer desires to try out high school boys or city men to test their capabilities and endeavor to utilize their services, this department will attempt to secure the needed help when

1. A proper wage is assured—*i.e.*, a minimum of 25c per hour, out of which the worker is to pay for his board and lodging.
2. When proper living arrangements are available, *i.e.*, clean sleeping quarters, provided with good cots, some degree of privacy, with proper bathing and toilet facilities.
3. When meals are clean, nourishing and reasonably good in quantity, quality, and variety.
4. When charges for board and lodging are not excessive, *i.e.*, 75c to \$1.00 per day or the going rate for proper values.
5. When the work to be done by high school boys does not require more than eight hours actual work.
6. When continuous work is available for a period of thirty days or more.

If any farmer, wishing to avail himself of this labor, has less than thirty days' work in sight, he should consider the possibility of co-operation with other farmers needing help in order to insure sufficient work to warrant labor going to him.

7. When the work is not more than 100 miles from a source of labor.
8. When a sufficient supply of suitable labor is available.
9. When board and lodging is supplied to a representative, if high school help is utilized in groups of ten or more.
10. When there is no Sunday work except in well-defined emergencies.

Whenever groups of immature young men are to try farm work, it is desirable (and necessary if sent out by this department) to have a teacher or other qualified person accompany them to oversee their living habits, and general well-being. Such representative should possess the confidence of both boys and parents and have ability to meet with diplomacy and dispatch all conditions necessitating his interference. He should have nothing to do with the work itself, other than to inspire the boys with a due sense of personal responsibility, as the proper conduct of the work itself best rests with the employer. This representative should have privilege of picking men and sending home those not doing proper work.

Whenever an organization with a recognized head offers its services, all details of business will be arranged directly with the representative, who in turn will deal with the individual members of his group. This applies particularly to such organizations as Boy Scouts, Y. M. C. A., high school delegations, or charitable societies.

Whenever unorganized help is offered, this department will furnish the necessary information concerning existing conditions under which the work is to be done, perfect whatever working organization is needed and make the best possible arrangements with the employer.

In offering its assistance to the farmers, this department cannot guarantee either a supply of labor or its efficiency. Neither in formulating the above terms does this department want to appear as if forcing or advocating impossible regulations. But present day conditions and the necessity of safeguarding the health and family interests of the available supply warrants as clear-cut a statement of the situation as can be given for the express purpose of showing how matters stand and to insure as high a degree of success as possible in the utilization of such potential labor as we have at hand.

In addition to making every attempt to bring together available labor and farmers in want of labor, this department stands ready to render to the best of its ability a report of existing living and wage conditions, or the kind, number, ages, and condition of help offering services, when requested by one or both sides of any parties interested

in the growing and moving of crops necessary to the conduct of the war.

In its work this department will count in the future, as it has relied in the past, upon the valuable and active co-operation of the Commission of Immigration and Housing to aid in recommending and passing upon proper conditions in housing and boarding arrangements.